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AN ADDRESS

ON

SCHOLARLY WORKERS: THEIR SPIRIT AND METHODS.

BY

HON. JOHN EATON, LL. D.,

U. S. Commissioner of Education.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE LITERARY SOCIETIES OF ROANOKE COLLEGE,
SALEM, VA., AT THE ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT,

ON

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 1879.

WASHINGTON, D. C.
JUDD & DETWEILER, PRINTERS.
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SCHOLARLY WORKERS: THEIR SPIRIT AND METHODS.

Youth is credited with being a period of awkwardness. Goldsmith, to whom we are indebted for some of the most beautiful passages in the English language, was often embarrassed in finding the right word in conversation; but, more serious than all that appears to the observation of others, is that awkwardness which the upright soul feels when, in any unfitting or wrong attitude, it approaches truth or the responsibilities of life. Life's labyrinth is all dark before the youth; neither its complicated passages nor its end are revealed. How shall they find the clew? To aid in this crisis, the home is filled with loving solicitude, the school offers its teachers and appliances, the church its precepts and sacraments, and the wise of all ages their philosophies.

Coming here to greet the gathered representatives of the wisdom and youth of this cherished institution, can I do better than invite attention to a discussion of the spirit and methods of scholarly workers?

Our American civilization is a great stimulus to the assumption of responsibilities. Its fundamental principles force all of us to be workers. Our law recognizes no rights of primogeniture. The precepts and practices of our life, while they stimulate individuality, tend to make us careless of the past and unmindful of the future, and to concentrate our thoughts and deeds on the present. We are pronounced deficient in the respect for antiquity; it is declared that the families of our great men lose the characteristics that made them eminent after the third, the second, or perchance the first generation, and it is claimed that the cherishing of more inspiring memories and the encouragement of more far reaching hopes would afford elements for a better training

in the responsibilities of life than is possible under our present tendencies.

Moreover, our youth cannot now retire to a solitude so remote that they shall be influenced solely by the opinions and events of a single community. Their food, their clothing, their society, are affected by world wide influences. Nothing is really foreign to them. Before them are spread the crimes and virtues of the remotest peoples. The most distant questions of society, of politics, of science and art, of belief and conduct, press upon them for solution. Nothing before them is apart by itself either for observation or contemplation; nothing is simple; all is complex, vast, intense, swift. Their voyage of life is not, as was depicted in ancient mythology, a middle way between two opposing perils, after passing which the course was safe. The modern Scylla and Charybdis, the perils and competitions of our youth, are found in every opportunity and every responsibility, great and small. What fortitude, patience, and self-mastery of spirit—what honesty, fidelity and comprehensiveness of method will they need! Already, before the hand of the youth directs the rudder alone, unaided and unsupported, he has encountered, in type or in reality, much of the sea and the weather of his future life; he enters upon the responsibilities we here consider with a certain development of his powers. If he has a Byronic nature, it is no matter how brilliantly he is endowed; if he is compelled to confess with that misguided poet: "I never was governed when I was young," he is likely to enter upon a career defiant of truth as practised in decent life and taught in the precepts of morality. Like the savage, his keenest pursuit, his largest development, his utmost struggles, are not likely to be for self-mastery, but to seize or destroy his game or his enemy. He is not submissive, he is not humble, he cannot therefore expect to enter the temple of truth; its gates are closed to him; its enchanting occupations, its beauties and glories and divine inspirations he cannot pene-

trate. But if possessed of the willing, cheerful spirit of Shakspeare, truth opens to him on every hand and invites his approach. He has the key to her richest treasure. To him there are sermons in the rudest stones; to him

——“the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

In nature and art his sympathies are universal :

“Aloft ascending, and descending down
To inferior kinds.”

He enters into the conditions and moods of others; he bears their joys and sorrows. He knows men “from the heart outward, and not from the flesh inward.” He penetrates the core, and gets at the essence of men and things; to him the essential and non-essential are not confused. When he encounters the evils that assail him he does not, Sampson like, bury himself with them in a common ruin, because he has never been blinded by yielding himself to the influences of Delilah. May he not be described always as Sainte-Beuve described his ideal of a scientist—the soul of a sage in the body of an athlete: he may not have realized it in himself, but he is aiming at it. With this in view his hours are occupied with exercise of mind or body; his physical, mental, moral, spiritual habits are formed; his aims are selected, purified and elevated; his opinions are considered, cherished, vindicated and practised; he detects and rejects the false, the mean, the wrong, for himself and others, with a precision and certainty like that of chemical repulsion; his nature, his principles, his practices are in accord with the highest in every condition of life. He does not reject the principles of heredity; but memories of ancestral inferiority do not degrade him, nor ancestral superiority infatuate him with foolish pride: he cherishes their lessons while he draws, from his responsibilities to posterity, influences that impart to him in the midst of the intensest

activity something of the sublimity of repose. He accepts for himself, whatever his sphere, Milton's dictum that every man "ought of himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best" and most honorable things. His spirit is strong enough, and his methods so adapted as to overcome his own weaknesses and surrounding difficulties. An all-absorbing purpose, reaching to a distant and high object of pursuit, finds some way of lifting and drawing him towards it, whatever the incidental resistance. Ten thousand demands may come upon him; he may be hourly turned aside, still he is accomplishing that great purpose. Plutarch describes Julius Cæsar as a spare man, of soft white skin, distempered in the head and subject to epilepsy, yet enduring beyond the wont of the strongest, coarse diet, indefatigable journeys, exposures in the field, exhausting labors, finding sleep in chariots and litters as he was borne along, and employing even his times of rest in the pursuit of action. Amanuenses wrote for him as he went from fort to fort; his letters were literally dictated from the saddle; here surely was mastery of self and of environment; with him difficulties encountered were but spurs to greater effort. Each day, nay each hour, marked the purpose not only conceived, but executed. With him, to will was to do.

In striking contrast appears that other class of minds of which Coleridge was a representative. Of massive mind, possessed of vast and varied intellectual treasures, he was forever beginning and never finishing. Of him Charles Lamb said: "Poor Col.; but two days before he died he wrote to a publisher proposing an epic poem on the wanderings of Cain in twenty-four books. It is said he has left behind him more than forty thousand treatises of criticism, metaphysics, and divinity, but few of them in a state of completion." Southey wrote to Coleridge: "You spawn plans like a herring; I only wish as many of the seed were to vivify in proportion." True he had great activity of thought, but he had an equally great constitutional indolence. If he

had cultivated the spirit and the methods best fitted to produce results out of these conditions, he might not always have finished his undertakings, but certainly he would have completed more than he did, and have made a marvellously different figure in literature and history. In some individuals an embarrassment arises from the apparent separation between the subjective and objective. The eyes are open, the object is before them, but they have no vision of anything external. Thought here obeys two commands: the law of association and the law of the will. Under either there may come the play of reason, of memory, of imagination and the excitation of the sensibilities. The law of association may carry the mind on its abstract ethereal track, unaffected by any influence through the senses. This abstraction may be employed in profound thought, in those processes of deduction and induction out of which came the triumphs of a Plato, Aristotle, Newton, Kepler, and a Laplace. Or they may occupy the mind in useless reverie, in dreams, in sentimentality, such as move the infatuated reader of fiction to tears of sympathy and conceptions of the greatest heroism without stimulating him to kindly word or deed for the relief of suffering, and without creating enough respect for himself or others to make him appear in public decently attired. True, our highest thoughts never fully grow into acts. The greatest genius is more apt to be dissatisfied with his attainments than the man who stands at the other end of the intellectual scale; and here, therefore, the spirit and methods of scholarly workers come to their aid.

Here they too are met by a favorite fallacy, covered up in an important truth; they are told that the mind must follow its own bent. While this is in the main true, they should not be deceived so far as to follow natural impulse to their own destruction. All should aim at completeness of nature as well as art by attending duly to that portion of the body or that faculty of the mind which is deficient or feeble. This is needful not only for the defective part but

for the sure health and intelligent activity of the whole organism. Young people may be deceived by their own judgment as to what is the tendency of their natural parts; when, however, this is accurately determined, they may well settle in the main their pursuits in life, but never to the total neglect of any thing essential to manhood or womanhood. To mistakes made at this point we may trace many failures in life, many imperfect or distorted characters which appear to have no place in the economy of society, and which everywhere confess themselves out of place; in this opinion all who know them concur. Follow this fallacy, let it become a universal rule of action in a republican form of government, and we can easily imagine how soon these perverted natures, perverted in physique and in mind, may become sufficiently numerous to modify unfavorably the enactment and administration of law. How long before these half-developed souls may be constituted into classes and arrayed in deadly feuds against each other?

Writers on vital statistics tell us that in savage life untempered exposures destroy the feeble in infancy; and they give this as a reason why we never encounter among barbarians puny and sickly men and women.

Is it to be true that the haste and multiplicity of affairs (which the civilization of our day permits like an avalanche to overtake so many when young) are to smite down their manhood and their womanhood, so that a gulf, well nigh as dark as the river of death, shall set them apart, as an asylum or prison class, from the possibilities, the hopes, the memories, the occupations of those who, in the survival of the fittest, as the men and women with healthy minds and healthy bodies, enduring, true, noble, pursue the higher life that places our age in contrast with all others—setting them in their destitution and criminality apart from the benefactors of our race who fill our firmament with the primal duties that shine aloft like stars and scatter at their feet like flowers

“The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless.”

As it is the part of civilization to arrest the infant death rate of savage life, so it is the part of wisdom for us to determine and arrest the causes that increase among us these destitute and criminal classes.

It is the merit of our Christian civilization that its growth has an inherent tendency to overcome and render impossible these evils. Every man must be the architect of his own fortune; he must live honestly with all men, and provide for those of his own household. Every man is constituted a worker, and, beginning at the beginning, he must of necessity be a learner, and in this sense a scholarly worker, whether his instrument be the spade, the plow, the carpenter's plane, the sword, or the pen.

The principles we have been discussing are of universal application. They embody themselves in the declaration, the larger the manhood the better for the man in every sphere; or, as Socrates put it, first the man then the specialist; and, as I have said, a marked quality of our institutions is their arrangement and tendency to aid every one in producing these results. Our theory is that every one chooses for himself. The aim of our Christian institutions is that he shall choose the better, that our large liberty shall not work out a greater evil but a greater good. True, a man may reject this obligation partly or even altogether; no decree of king or caste controls him; he chooses freely until his wrong choice leads to that wrong act which society for its self-protection selects for punishment. Here he encounters in a most serious form a lesson on the perversions of character. In order that his natural capacity may be aided in these choices by the concentration of additional light upon his path, the whole people in their capacity as citizens guarantee universal instruction. We may observe how this tendency of our Christian civilization to aid a man in balancing and making the best of every condition, follows him in his duties and in his misfortunes.

Perchance he is a husband and father, with a competency,

and is overtaken by misfortunes. Then, this action of the whole people through the state comes to his relief; perhaps offers first to instruct his children. The eldest child finds his way to the free school, and, it may be, onward to the free high school, and thence to the free university. The second child is perhaps afflicted with blindness; the State offers the school for the blind, and so far restores a balance to his capacity that he not only supports himself but blesses others. The third child is deaf and dumb; the same is accomplished for him. The fourth and last is an imbecile, and the restorative, balancing tendency of our Christian civilization is not yet exhausted, but the state takes this unfortunate child, repulsive in his want of mind, to the school for idiots. Nay, his wife becomes insane, and the state affords her an asylum for the rest of her life. Nor is this the end; the father overborne, his efforts paralyzed by the shocks of repeated and inevitable misfortunes, dies penniless, and a civil officer gives him honorable burial. Nor are these acts of Christian, statesmanlike reason without their reward. The children are all saved from pauperism and crime, those cankers upon the body politic; all are self-supporting.

Even the idiot, in due time, comes forth from his school home, to perform among friends those simple tasks that earn him an ample livelihood. The others are good citizens, thrifty livers, Christian workmen; and the first-born, possibly by the greater aid of his collegiate instruction, returns to the State a hundred fold the expenditures for the entire family, by his career of eminent usefulness in some one of the skilled industries or the learned professions.

Society and philosophy sometimes allow these supreme tendencies to be overlooked, and the young catch the idea that there is no difference between doing well and doing ill; their moral vision is obscured, as was Solomon's when he saw the end alike to all. For a moment, or to a limited observation, there are present so many instances of wealth

and position attained by fraud—the alloy or gilding passing for the pure gold, the adulterated for the genuine article, the shadow for the substance, the clothes for the man, the name for the thing—that in his inexperience he doubts the difference. To increase his surprise he finds literature, and even a pretence of philosophy, inculcating this fallacy. Perchance some Hudibras solemnly informs him—

“He has first matter seen undressed
And found it naked and alone,
Before one rag of *form* was on.”

His confusion is increased by the war of the schools, the thunder of their artillery, the gleam of their swords, and flash of their musketry.

Studying the progress of events in the history of nations, of individuals, of doctrines, he observes that the growth of these evils has been followed by extreme remedies. How shall he deal with this incomprehensible past? Shall he attempt to settle all questions for himself? Shall he repeat the experiments and errors of the astrologer and alchemist before he rejects their follies and accepts the results of scientific astronomy or chemistry? Shall a youthful community go through all the forms of institutions and laws that have been tried, from the times of the Egyptians down to our own modern republic, before adopting a permanent form of government? Rejection of the palpably false or the worn out and effete is the only conclusion. Using native good sense something must be taken on trust. He must trust his own powers within their limits; on the farm he must trust the soil, the seed, the season and methods of labor; in the manufactory, the nature of the wood, the stone, the metal, the implements, and processes of change; in commerce he must add trust in the fabricator and the conditions of transit; in society and civil affairs he must trust his fellows. Shall he pause here, or will he continue in the exercise of the same good sense in the higher region of morality and relig-

ion? Shall his faith rise, not contrary to reason, but above reason, and accept the divine Creator, benefactor, ruler? True, the laws of chemistry and physics, astronomy, geology, mathematics, and biology may accompany and confirm him, but cannot direct him in this last, highest act of the soul. Indeed he has not come up to this high standpoint without serious lessons in the exercise of temper, and larger discrimination in the selection and use of methods. In the physical act of going up and down hill he exercises equally the powers of reason and will, but each act requires a different movement of the muscles. His spirit, his reason, all his powers may everywhere be brought into requisition, and there appear more and more evidences of final accord between all facts and all laws that he studies; but the tests of chemistry are not available either in physics or moral affinity, and he must leave behind the demonstrations of mathematics when he passes into the region of moral science. His theology and geology will be found in accord, though by most diverse tests. It may not gratify his conceit or pride or vanity that he cannot succeed in this high region by the methods of any physical science in which he may be expert; that in his moral activities his conclusions must be based solely on probabilities, and that for all beyond he must trust with the simplicity and humility of a child; but in all his pursuit of art or science he has had experience in discerning between true and false, and, if honest with himself, he has found his powers the more healthful, the more free the atmosphere around him is from admixtures of error. Not an inconsequential aid has he found daily toil; again and again it has solved problems beyond the reach of his science. Cecil said of Sir Walter Raleigh, "I know that he can labor terribly." Thackeray said of Macaulay: "He reads twenty books to write a sentence; he travels a hundred miles to make a line of description." Observe how he lays out the plan for his history, and then revises and re-revises and divides the time for the work between reading and travelling,

that he may personally know all the books and all the places before writing, and then proposes to get off two pages a day, and afterward devote a year to polishing, retouching, and printing. He added to all the vast powers with which nature had endowed him patient, minute, and persistent diligence. He answered to Pope's precept that a good writer must be a good blotter. Woodrow observes of one of his compositions that scarcely five consecutive lines in any one of Macaulay's minutes will be found unmarked by blots or corrections. Follow him in working up the battle of the Boyne, his visits, his notes, actually spending nineteen working days over thirty octavo pages and then dissatisfied with the result. Fortunate, if this is understood to be the price of supremacy in any art. Leonardo da Vinci would walk the whole length of Milan that he might improve a single tint in his picture of the Last Supper. Napoleon would consult his army returns in the sleepless hours of night, and during the overture of the opera would study problems in the movements of his armies. The spirit of toil is their all conquering power, while with purity of motive and fidelity of method their heads are not troubled with the snakes of Orestes or the "bricks" of the American debauchee. No duty can call them too quickly, or require them to wait too long or sacrifice too much. In their relations to others they accord the fairness and charity they expect; their animosity, or jealousy, or anger, or other evil passions, if stirred within them, are tempered with the thought of their supreme obligation to what is right, and the conviction that human life is a coöperation, a correlation of forces, in which we all serve by turn. We drink a mingled cup, but recognize order as the first law of all that is good.

One plants, another waters. An incident in Newton's life fitly illustrates this better spirit and method. His best efforts in demonstrating his theory of gravitation, by calculating the revolutions of the moon on the basis of the earth's radius, as then accepted, were unsuccessful, and he

put aside his papers for sixteen years, until, receiving information of a French colleague's more accurate measurement of the earth, he resumed his calculations and successfully verified the result.

They give light and accept it; their honor lies not in their titles or lack of them, not in the noise, or lack of it, that attends their position.

However humble their sphere, they make that daily advancement in character and in the condition of their toil which affords them the essential joys of triumph. From the most indifferent source may come their greatest lesson, their highest reward.

They recall that the royal associate Naaman received from the humble Hebrew servant the word that led him to the cure of his leprosy.

Buffon, after long years of the severest study, was led, by the inspection of marine yet inland shells which he found different from species then known to be inhabiting the earth, to that idea of infinite time containing successive creations which so extended man's vision and has given relief to so many scientists. Facts for them require no name of renown to command their attention; but they must be facts; they seek their value whether recognized by fashion or not. They understand that nothing is fully known if taken in its condition at any given moment; and they study its history, relations, and possibilities. Their methods may so accord with the unfolding of principles involved that they may forecast the coming event dependent upon them as accurately as Burke the French Revolution; yet they do not set themselves up as prophets. However much they have attained to, they are in the attitude of the devout Robinson, expecting "more light and truth yet to break forth."

Could we conceive that the questions over which men have contended during the last century of our civilization had been submitted to nations and peoples altogether of this spirit and these methods—how different would have

been the course in human history, even in the most enlightened nations, such as England, Germany, France, and our own country? How would the resistance to man's mastery over the forces of nature—opposition to the progress of human institutions in the interests of universal humanity—have diminished or entirely vanished? Conceive the people of our own land all characterized by this spirit and these methods, how much less of evil, how much more of good would they bring out of our problems of labor and capital, of finance, debt and credit, coinage, currency; or of questions of industry, of adjustment in city or country population?—questions of race, politics, art, science, and religion. If we desire these questions treated with more reason and less rant, more fairness and less fury, with a fair likelihood of just and final settlement, it is a matter of profound concern that our people should be scholarly workers, with right spirit and methods. The great task of preparation must be accomplished during youth or man's formative period. The precepts of statesmanship, philanthropy, and education recognize this fact. In the wide-spread disposition to revise our educational schemes, with a view of adapting them to new experiences, we have great need to avoid the destruction of good already in our possession; but, as a first condition in producing scholarly workers, education must be universal. No single individual must escape its influence or its benefits. The progress of the whole people in all high attainments in character and in life will be determined by the height to which their average advancement can be carried. The complication and vastness of the questions of our day cannot be successfully encountered without a sufficient number of minds developed both by the highest general culture and by instruction in necessary specialties. The principles which have modified instruction in the direction of the so-called learned professions—law, medicine, and theology—must be applied to all pursuits, and the science and art of instruction therein ascer-

tained and applied. What must be done is not unfittingly illustrated by Quintilian's Treatise upon the Education of the Orator. The method of training is essentially the same for all skilful work, but the materials may differ. We have acted upon the supposition that if the mind receives proper discipline, adaptation and adjustment will follow of themselves. Already the progressive nations of Europe have learned that instruction has a part in special adjustments as well as in general culture, and schools of technology and of trades have multiplied indefinitely. Quality, beauty, fabrics, are wholes composed of totally dissimilar elements. It is absurd to suppose that the analysis of one will impart knowledge of the other. We may well give to everyone the utmost manhood, but we need also remember that before a merchant can understand marketable fabrics he must understand the raw material of them and the processes of its manufacture. Classification and nomenclature are as necessary in his business, and may be as rigidly defined, as in the logician's art, equally complete and comprehensive, and, in their measure, elevating for all industries and professions. When we consider the aimless, vague scholasticism under which we have been training workers and turning them out *en masse* for the thousand duties of our complicated life, and recall how often they have looked upon their education simply as a trick to enable them to avoid honest labor and live by their wits, we marvel not that the tramp is abroad in the land, but we may well wonder that any other profession is more numerous.

Fortunately the movement for modification in education is not wholly towards technical excellence; the best minds are concerning themselves with the general subject. In place of occasional squibs from literary skirmishers, we have knowledge, logic, experience, and eloquence engaged in setting it forth in all its bearings. The science of education is being made to agree, not merely as it has in the past,

with the subjective conditions of the human soul as formulated in literature, but is brought into accord with the structural conditions of human society, where facts may be observed, recorded, and generalized. The day is passing away when it will be believed that the man who has failed in everything else will be fit for the teaching of youth; no task requires better nature, larger acquisitions, or deserves greater reward; besides, all pursuits have this added function, that they educate so far as they influence others. The vastness and responsibilities assumed in collegiate work no one may limit. Every act, be it the choice of a study or the selection of an officer, is of consequence.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, alumni, officers, and students of Roanoke College, I have discussed here these principles with the more satisfaction, because I believe they accord with your own, and are embraced in your aims and illustrated in your efforts for the increase of the means and the advancement of the work of your college. You are erecting new buildings; you have selected as your president a young man. I congratulate the college that its guardians have chosen so wisely; him that the duties are so honorable, so full of possible good, and that he has been thought fit for the head of the college by his own associates, its devoted friends. Even in his early manhood I see fitness and promise. The college is young and will need all the toil which his vigor and strength can command. Moreover, I remember that it has been said:

“In the lexicon of youth, which fate reserves
For a bright manhood, there is no such word
As—*fail*.”

As an example, an encouragement, he has before him the lives of some of our college presidents, whose names are most cherished, who began early and labored long, carrying their institutions through diverse and repeated trials with a unity of purpose and effort which had not a little to

do with the continued usefulness of their colleges, and which might not have been possible if older men had been chosen and frequent changes followed.

The College, in the period of its history, has already accomplished much. It aims at honest, thorough work, and at sympathies as broad as the land in which we live, as universal as humanity and truth. Situated where

“ Nature’s heart
Beats strong amid the hills,”

here Wordsworth could have fitly said—

“ How beautiful this dome of sky
And the vast hills in fluctuation fixed.”

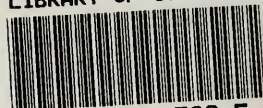
Here all out-doors offers itself as a free library to every student, and over it we may conceive written, as over the library at Thebes, the inscription, “ Medicine for the soul.”

Here, indeed, are the conditions favorable to health of mind and body. Our superior instruction is greatly imperilled by the increase of expenses. Here life is not cut short by the cost of living; and here, aspiring youth who are compelled to unite plain living with high thinking may find the culture that too great expenses would forbid them elsewhere. In England there is an old college saying, “ Pray at King’s, eat at Trinity, and study at Jesus.”

All needful for the complete development of every man, may they be found for the future, as for the past, all united in fit harmony at Roanoke; and that of every student, as he goes forth from its halls to the responsibilities of life, it may be said, in the words of Goethe—

“ Like as a star,
That maketh not haste,
That taketh not rest,
Be each one fulfilling
His god-given hest.”

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